Scripture the Rule of Faith.

A

SERMON

Preached at

St. *Martins in the Fields*, Febr. 3. $169\frac{5}{6}$.

BEING THE

Second of the LECTURE

For this Present YEAR,

Founded by the Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE, Esquire.

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Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

LONDON:

Printed for **Ri. Chiswell**, and **Tho. Cockerill**, Senr & Junr: At the *Rose* and *Crown* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard; and at the *Three Legs* in the *Poultrey*. MDCXCVI.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life, and they are they which teſtify of me.

AFTER that our Saviour had Cured the Impotent Man at the Pool *Bethesda*, *Ver.* 9. the *Jews* ſought to Slay him, becauſe he had Healed him on the Sabbath-day, *Ver.* 16. And ſo much the more were they bent upon this, as in Vindication of himſelf he had *ſaid alſo that God was his* [ἴδιον] own proper *Father, making himſelf equal with God*, V. 18.

Our Saviour therefore, in the following part of this Chapter, largely inſiſts upon the Explication and Proof of what he had Aſſerted, and Appeals to a Threefold Teſtimony for his Juſtification, *Viz.* (1.) That of *John* Baptiſt, who bore Witneſs of him, and to whom *for a ſeaſon* they gave Credit, *Ver.* 32, 33, 34, 35.

(2.) His own Works, *Ver.* 36. *they*, ſaith he, *bear witneſs of me, that the Father hath ſent me.* (3.) The Scriptures, *Ver.* 46. *Had ye believed Moſes, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.* And in the Text; *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think*, &c.

The Words may be either an Appeal to the *Jews*, and ſo are to be read by way of Affirmation and Conceſſion, *ye do ſearch the Scriptures*, as it is in the Margin: Or they may be read Imperatively and by way of Exhortation, as it is in our Verſion, *Search* ye *the Scriptures.*

If we admit the former, then they are a Reproof to the *Jews*, that profeſſed to be very Converſant in thoſe Sacred Books, ſo that not a Word, Syllable or Tittle ſhould eſcape their notice (as it's ſaid in After-times of the *Maſorites*), and yet ſo little heeded what was the main Subject of them, that they obſerved not how the Characters belonging to the Meſſias pointed plainly to him.

[Baſ. l. 2. Bapt. c. 4. Athan. Tom. 2. p. 295. Par. 1627.]

But I conceive the Words are to be underſtood as an Exhortation, as the way of our Saviour's arguing doth ſhew, which is from point to point, from *John* Baptiſt, to his own Works; and from his Works to the Scriptures: And ſo St. *Baſil* and St. *Athanaſius* underſtand them.

And

And if the Words contain a Duty, then they are an Appeal of our Saviour to the higheſt Authority, that is, Divine Revelation, and what even the *Jews* themſelves admitted for ſuch. So that ſhould they reject the Teſtimony of *John* Baptiſt, whom they did at one time believe to be a Prophet: Or ſhould they be ſo perverſe (as they ſometime were) as to impute our Saviour's Miraculous Works to *Beelzebub*; yet the Scriptures was a proof not to be gainſaid. For they themſelves thought and *judged* (as the Word δοκεῖτε ſignifies) that *Eternal Life* was therein Revealed, and by the direction whereof it was to be obtained; and yet even thoſe did *teſtify of him.* Having brought the Controverſy thus far, it would in reaſon be at an end: Thither therefore he remits them, to their Authority he Appeals, theſe he requires them to *Search*; and if they Searched, and Searched ſincerely and impartially, they would find Him (whom they now traduced, and whoſe Life they ſought) to be the Meſſias there deſcribed. So he concludes his Diſcourſe, *There is one that accuſeth you, even Moſes, in whom ye truſt. For had ye believed Moſes* and his Writings, *ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me, Ver.* 45, 46. Or as it is in the Text; *They teſtify of me.*

From

From the Words I Obſerve;

1. That notwithſtanding there is a Revelation from God, and owned to come from him; yet there may be Diſputes about Points contained in that Revelation. It was ſo here, the *Jews* as well as our Saviour believed the Old Teſtament to be a Divine Revelation, and to contain all things neceſſary to Everlaſting Life; and yet there was a Diſpute about an Article of no leſs Importance than whether our Saviour was the Meſſias therein Propheſied of, and whom they hoped for Salvation by.

2. There is a Direction what to do in this Caſe, and that is to Repair to the Rule; *Search the Scriptures*, impartially Examine them, and compare what is therein Revealed with what our Saviour affirmed concerning himſelf.

3. There is the final Deciſion of the Caſe, and that is by the Scriptures. You grant, ſaith he, they contain all things neceſſary to *Eternal Life, and they are they which teſtify of me.* Thereby he is willing to abide, and thereby they ought to be concluded.

4. Here is a further Direction how to *Search*, implied in the Verſes following, *Ver.* 41, &c. and that is with Humility and Diligence; with Impar-

Impartiality and Sincerity, without Prejudice and Prepoſſeſſions.

The Words, we ſee, contain a plain Reſolution of a Caſe of great Importance, and that is, what is to be done in Matters of Doubt or Controverſy, and how perſons ſhould proceed to obtain due ſatisfaction.

And here the firſt thing to be agreed upon, is, By what ſhall we be tried, what is the Rule which is to determine us, and which we muſt abide by?

The next thing is, Who ſhall be the Judge?

The Third is, What are the Qualifications of ſuch as are to judge?

To the Firſt, our Saviour Anſwers, We muſt go to the *Scriptures*; for if it be a matter of Conſequence, and concerns *Eternal Life*, there to be ſure it is contained, and there it is to be found.

As to the Second, He ſaith, the perſons concerned are to *Search*; thoſe that doubt, queſtion or deny, are carefully to examine.

As to the Third, He ſaith, they muſt lay aſide all other Intereſts, and *Search* with all Humility, as thoſe that love God, and *ſeek after the honour that cometh from him only*, Ver. 44.

So that by this reſolution of the Caſe we

 have

have gained two or three conſiderable points, towards the reſolving all Doubts, and ending all Controverſies in the Chriſtian Church: And they are,

1. That the Scriptures are the only Rule, by which we are to judge and determine concerning points of Faith, and neceſſary to Salvation.

2. That it appertains to all perſons to have recourſe to, and to judge by this Rule concerning matters of that nature, and which are of that Importance.

3. A Direction how to Search, and that is with Modeſty and Humility, with Sincerity and Impartiality.

1ſt. The Scriptures are the only Rule by which we are to judge and determine concerning Articles of Faith, and matters neceſſary to Salvation.

'Tis on all hands granted, that there muſt be ſome Authority which Faith is to be reſolved into: For Faith is no other than an aſſent to ſome Propoſition or Propoſitions upon Authority: And according as the Authority is, ſuch is our Faith, Humane or Divine.

So that Divine Faith muſt have Divine Authority, and Divine Authority is no other than Divine

Divine Revelation, delivered *at ſundry times and in divers manners*, Written or Unwritten.

And where there is no verbal Revelation by Perſons Divinely Inſpired, the Written Word is the only Authority that Faith can be reſolved into; which our Saviour here appeals to, and propounds as a means ſufficient, and in their Circumſtances, as the only means for ending the Diſpute.

The Queſtion here in Debate was (as I obſerved before), Whether Jeſus was the Meſſias propheſied of in the Old Teſtament? This the *Jews* denied, and our Saviour affirms, appealing for proof of it to *John* Baptiſt, to his own Works, and to the Scriptures, and there he leaves it. For this was the old and true way of deciding matters of that nature; *To the Law and to the Teſtimony; if they ſpeak not according to this Word, there is no light in them.* Iſai. 8. 20.

Indeed in After-ages a party of the *Jews* roſe up, that *taught for Doctrines the Commandments of men*; that did exalt their Traditions to an equal Authority with the Divine Law, and made it equally a fault to tranſgreſs them; as our Saviour charges it upon them (of which more anon); But our Saviour ſhews the invalidity of this, and directs them to the Fountain of all Mat. 15. 2, 3, 9. Mar. 7. 8, *&c.*

Revealed Truth, the Holy Scriptures then extant, as a Rule ſufficient to guide them, and of Authority ſufficient to determine them.

And this was the courſe he at other times took: As doth the Young Ruler put a ſerious Caſe to him; *Good Maſter, What ſhall I do that I may inherit Eternal Life?* Our Saviour Anſwers, *Thou knoweſt the Commandments.*

Mark 10. 17.

Do the Sadduces, that denied a Future State and a Reſurrection to it, contend with our Saviour about it? He argues with them from the Scriptures, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures. ---As touching the Reſurrection of the Dead, have ye not read,* &c.

Mat. 22. 29, 31.

Would he inſtruct the Diſciples in the great Articles of Faith? He doth it from thoſe Sacred Oracles: *Ought not Chriſt to have ſuffer'd?* &c. And *beginning at Moſes and all the Prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himſelf.*

Luk. 24. 26.

In like manner did the Apoſtles proceed to convince the *Jews* of their Incredulity: So St. *Paul reaſoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging, That Chriſt muſt needs have ſuffered and riſen again, and that this Jeſus is the Chriſt.*

Act. 17. 2, 3.

Act. 18. 28. So *Apollos ſhewed by the Scriptures, That this Jeſus was the Chriſt.*

To

To this they always remitted them, as to a Rule certain and ſufficient, and without which nothing was to be received as an Article of Faith.

To a Rule certain, called therefore by St. *Peter* 2. 1, 19. *A more ſure word of Prophecy*, and which he prefers before a Voice from Heaven.

And a Rule ſufficient, that is (as St. *Paul* ſaith) *able to make wiſe unto Salvation*, and *thoroughly to furniſh* even *the Man of God*, the Teacher, *unto all good works*. 2 Tim. 3.15,16.

And when theſe things were ſpoken at that time more immediately of the *Jewiſh* Canon of the Old Teſtament, they may equally as well be applied to the New; which is not only as much the *Scripture* (as St. *Peter* calls it, 2 *Pet.* 3. 19. as I have before proved) but alſo by the addition of it, renders the Old much more intelligible and complete. *Serm.* 6.

Now there can be no imaginable reaſon aſſigned why the Scripture which was then ſufficient in all points neceſſary to Salvation, and for reſolving of Faith, ſhould now be inſufficient after the Revelation made by Chriſt: That is, that we ſhould be more at a loſs with the more clear, full, and perfect Revelation, than they were under

under the leſs perfect; that what in the *laſt days* God Deliver'd and Reveal'd *by his Son*, ſhould be leſs ſufficient to direct us, than what he *Spoke at ſundry times and in divers manners in times paſt* to the Jews *by the Prophets*.

And eſpecially conſidering, that there was a time when their Circumſtances were much the ſame with ours, which was in the long interval of 400 or 450 Years between the finiſhing of the *Jewiſh* Canon in the Prophecy of *Malachi*, (with whom Revelation ceaſed) and the appearance of *John* Baptiſt. In which time they were left, as we are, wholly to the Written Word of God for their Direction, and the Sole Authority they were to rely upon.

Since then in the Chriſtian Church there is no more need of any Traditionary or Unwritten Word, than the *Jews* had at that time at leſt, under the Law; and no more proof to be made of it now than there was then; it follows, that the Scripture is the only Rule, in excluſion to all others; and what is not contained therein by poſitive Proof, nor by evident Conſequence to be deduced from it, can no more be of Divine Authority and Obligation to Chriſtians, than Unwritten Traditions were then to the *Jews*.

This

This is the true Reſolution of Faith; and if our Saviour in a point of ſuch Importance, as his being the Meſſiah, put the Caſe upon this iſſue, we have good reaſon to think that it is ſtill the true Method of reaſoning among Chriſtians, and of reſolving any Point of Faith and Doctrine neceſſary to Salvation.

And therefore ſuppoſing we would find out the truth of any Doctrine thus Neceſſary and Fundamental, we muſt come hither for direction and reſolution; and if it has no Foundation in Scripture, we are to reject it. For it is a Rule in the Law, *Quod Inſtrumentum non dicit, nec nos dicere debemus*; or as it is uſually ſaid, Where that has not a Tongue to Speak, we are not to have an Ear to Hear. 'Tis then a *Doctrine of Men*, and may be *a Tradition of the Elders*, but is no Fundamental Article of the Chriſtian Faith.

But grant this; yet it has been before yielded, that Doubts and Diſputes may ariſe in the Church about the ſenſe of this Written Rule; and therefore who ſhall be the Arbiter to Judge and Determine; or how ſhall the Doubter be reſolved; or how ſhall he be ſure of the Senſe and Meaning of that which is Diſputed?

Our-

Our Saviour here directs what is to be done; *Search the Scriptures*, examine and prove all by this Rule. He doth not direct them to any ſpeaking Infallible Guide, nor to any Church, nor Perſons into whom their Faith is to be reſolv'd, but puts them themſelves upon the trial of it. Whence it follows,

2. That every Man is to judge for himſelf.

Certainly if ever there were a neceſſity of an Infallible Judge to Determine points of Controverſy to Mens hands, it had been in the long Interval before ſpoken of, between the Ceſſation of Prophecy, and the Appearance of our Saviour; when there were divers Sects riſen up among the *Jews*, continually contending one with another, and oftentimes about matters of very great Importance.

Of which I ſhall give a few Inſtances:

(1.) There was at that time a notable Controverſy about the Church, which was the true. This was the Caſe between the *Jews* and *Samaritans*; as 'tis ſtated by the Woman of *Samaria*, Joh. 4. 20. *Our Fathers*, ſaith ſhe to our Saviour, *Worſhipped in this Mountain* Gerizim, *and ye ſay that Jeruſalem is the place where men ought to worſhip*: That is, ye ſay, Yours is the true Church, and we ſay

ſay ours is that true Church: And each of theſe were ſo violently addicted to their own way, that *the Jews would have no dealing with the Samaritans*, nor ſo much as *ask drink* of them in their neceſſity, *V.* 9.

And on the other ſide, the *Samaritans* would not ſo much as receive the *Jews* into their Houſes, *Luk.* 9. 53.

Nay ſo high did the Conteſt grow between them, that it ingaged them in the fierceſt Quarrels, even to Aſſaults and Aſſaſſinations, where-ever they were, out of *Canaan* as well as in it; as their Hiſtorian Reports. *Joſeph Antiq. l. 12. c. 1. & 3.*

And though that *Samaritan* Temple was afterward utterly deſtroyed by *Hyrcanus* about 130 years before our Saviour; yet the Prejudices and Animoſities continued, till both fell under the common and final Deſtruction by the *Romans*. *L. 13. c. 6. & 18. l. 20. c. 5*

(2.) Another point in Controverſy was about a Future State, and the Reſurrection to it. This was Diſputed between the *Phariſees* and the *Sadducees*: For *the Sadducees held that there was no Reſurrection, nor Angel, nor* ſeparate *Spirit*, exiſting out of a Body (for that the *Jews* called a Spirit); but the *Phariſees confeſſed both*. *Acts* 23. 8. *Matt.* 22. 29. *Luk.* 24. 37, 39. *V. Lightfoot Tal. Exercit. on Acts.*

(3.) Another material Controverſy that then divided the Church, was, What was the Rule of

Faith? For the *Sadducees* would admit the Law of *Moſes* only to be of that Authority; and what was not therein contained, was among them accounted of no validity; and therefore they denied a Future State, becauſe (as they pretended) there was no proof of it from that Law. But the *Phariſees*, whatever reſpect they might give to the Law above the other Books of Scripture, yet allowed both to be of the ſame Authority; and ſo what was contained in any of them, to be the Object of Faith.

Again; The *Sadducees* were for Scripture alone without any Traditions; but the *Phariſees* ſet their Traditions in the ſame Rank with the Scriptures, and would have both of the ſame Obligation (as has been aforeſaid, *p.* 13) and if either was to give way to the other, the Scripture was rather to give way to Tradition, than Tradition to the Scripture. About which Matters there were often great Diſputes and Differences between theſe Two powerful Factions, as the Hiſtorian relates; ſo that however they were concerned in the Government, yet the Flame broke out upon every occaſion, and which St. *Paul* made his advantage of, who when he perceived that the one part of the Councel were *Phariſees* and the other *Sadducees*, cried out, *I am a Pha-*

Joſeph Antiq. l. 13. *c.* 18.

Acts 23. 6.

a Phariſee, and the Son of a Phariſee; of the hope and reſurrection of the dead I am called in queſtion. By theſe means they filled the whole Nation with Bandyings and Feuds; the Great Men generally ſiding with the *Sadducees*, and the People with the *Phariſees*, as the ſame Author ſaith.

(4.) Another Point in Controverſy among them was about the Meſſias. This was a Character much pretended to by ſeveral about the time of our Saviour; and was the Chief Subject in Diſpute between Him and the Ruling-part of the *Jews*.

Points ſurely theſe were of great Importance; *Viz.* Which is the True Church? What is the Rule of Faith? Whether there be a Future Life? And whether Jeſus be the Meſſias? And Points theſe were that the whole Nation of the *Jews* was divided about: So that in all Appearance there was ſcarcely ever a greater occaſion for a Determining-power to put this Caſe to an Iſſue.

Now if there had been any ſuch Infallible Authority, any ſuch Concluding-Power Viſible and Known; as it was then, if ever, neceſſary: ſo no doubt, there would have been Appeals to it in theſe Diſputes among themſelves, and with our Saviour. And in reaſon it may be

thought our Saviour would readily have Appeal'd to it; becauſe the Judge being Infallible, could never have Determined and given it againſt Him.

But we read of no ſuch Appeals in Scripture; but on the contrary, our Saviour puts them upon another way of Enquiry; not to *Search* after a Living and Infallible Judge, by whom they were to be finally concluded; but to *Search the Scriptures*, as the Infallible Rule by which they were to be Determined. And accordingly the Apoſtles adviſed their Auditors to the ſame Courſe; that they ſhould thereby *prove all things*, and *hold faſt* what upon trial they found to be *good* and true. That they ſhould *not believe every Spirit*, every Pretender to Revelation and Infallibility, but ſhould *try the Spirits whether they were of God*; and there was good reaſon it ſeems for it, becauſe, ſaith the Apoſtle, *many falſe Prophets are gone out into the World.* 1 Joh. 4. 1. that pleaded Inſpiration and a Divine Miſſion and Authority for what they Taught; as is manifeſt from the Epiſtles of the Apoſtles: And yet the Apoſtles (who themſelves had the Spirit of Infallibility and Immediate Revelation) referr'd the *Jews* to the Written Word as the Rule, and to their own Reaſon and Conſcience as the Judge.

1 Theſ. 5. 21.

2 Cor. 11. 13. Tit. 1. 10. 2 Ep. John 7. ver.

If

If ever any might have required an implicit Faith, and an abſolute and a blind Obedience to their judgment, it was Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and yet we find that they would have all Try and Examine, Weigh and Conſider. It being an innate Privilege of Mankind not to be led blindfold; but to be governed by their Reaſon, a privilege that true Religion doth evermore preſerve, and what every Man is obliged to defend, ſince every Man muſt *give an account of himſelf to God:* And therefore the *Bereans* are commended by St. *Paul*, as Εὐγενέστεροι more generous and free-ſpirited, *Who Searched the Scriptures daily, whether thoſe things were* true, which that Apoſtle Taught, and compared one with another, his Doctrine with that Holy Standard; and finding them to accord, *they received the word with all readineſs of mind.* So manifeſt is it, that in the Apoſtolical times every Man was to judge for himſelf, and to uſe the ſame reaſon in Religion, which he uſed in the Common Affairs of Life. Rom. 14. 12. Acts 17. 11, &c.

All that thoſe Inſpired Writers deſired, was, That Men would *Search*, and ſearch Impartially; and then they did not queſtion but as they would be like the *Bereans* in Temper, ſo they would be alike prevailed with in the concluſion, and

receive

receive the truth with the like promptitude and *readineſs of mind*; toward the finding out of which, Searching and Honeſty go a great way.

And whereas it might have been thought, however, that the times would come when the Apoſtles ſhould leave the World, and Immediate Inſpiration ſhould ceaſe with them, and ſo Men would be left to their own Fallible judgment in the Interpretation of the Rule: Yet there is no other proviſion made by our Saviour and the Apoſtles for preventing any ſuch Inconvenience (though they foreſaw and foretold there would be Deceivers and Impoſtors); but all Future-Ages were left in the very ſame Circumſtances with the *Jews* in that Period of 450 years before ſpoken of.

Mat. 24. 24. 2 Tim 4. 3. 2 Pet. 2. 1.

The Divine Writers ſuppoſing that there was in the Scriptures ſuch a plain and full Revelation of all things neceſſary to be known in order to Salvation, and there would be ſo much Reaſon and Senſe in Mankind (where ſo great an Intereſt as their Salvation was concerned) that with Ordinary and Common Helps, ſuch as Prayer and Conſideration, and Advice and appointed Teachers are, that they would be able to find out the Truth, or as much of it as was neceſſary

neceſſary to their Salvation, if they came to it with ſincere and well-diſpoſed minds: And that God would never ſuffer ſuch to want Ability, Opportunities and Means for it; or be wanting in mercy to them, in forgiving and paſſing by ſuch defects as were unavoidable to them in their Circumſtances. But that belongs to the next Head; and that is,

3. The Direction, what to do in this Caſe, which is to Search, that is, with Diligence and Impartiality.

Suppoſing this, that every Man is to judge for himſelf, then perſons will judge differently, and there will be Eternal and Endleſs Diſputes. To this our Saviour fits an Anſwer, not only in the Direction given in the Text, but alſo in the ſubſequent part of his Diſcourſe, which amounts to thus much; that we are to Search with Diligence and Impartiality.

The former is implied in the Word ἐρεύνατε *Search*, and which is very requiſite in matters of ſuch Importance as thoſe were which our Saviour is here Diſcourſing upon, and that is no leſs than his being the Meſſias, the Son of God. A Subject that from the quality of it, and the various paſſages in Scripture relating to it, requir'd due Conſideration. For though the Scriptures

are

are ſo plain in moſt neceſſary points, that in the Prophet's Phraſe, *the wayfaring men though fools*
Iſa 35.8. *ſhall not err therein*, and what are as ſoon underſtood as they are read: Yet there are even ſome of thoſe that in the nature of the thing require a ſtrict and careful attendance: Of which kind are ſuch as contain the Characters of the Meſſiah; and therefore lye not ſo open to a ſuperficial Eye, but that they may be miſunderſtood; and he that would then know and underſtand the force of the Argument referring to it, muſt *Search*. Our Saviour doth not therefore ſay only, That the Scriptures *Teſtify* of him, but requires them to *Search*, if they would be ſatisfied in it. For though proofs of this nature often are like Mines, that lie deep, yet upon Searching they are to be found: And if ſo, then our Ignorance is not to be imputed to their Obſcurity, but to our own Negligence, that we take not that courſe which is proper thereunto, and may very juſtly be requir'd.

But there is a further Qualification requiſite, and that is Sincerity and Impartiality.

Our Saviour here reſolves the Infidelity of the *Jews* into Obſtinacy and Inſincerity. They had another Intereſt to mind, a Reputation to maintain, Ver. 40. *Ye will not come to me.* Ver. 42.

Ye

Ye have not the love of God in you. Ver. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and ſeek not the honour which cometh from God only?*

Theſe and the like *Vicious Inclinations* hinder from *Searching*, or from finding the truth if they *Search*, or from receiving it though they find it. Perſons thus diſpoſed will then *handle the word of God deceitfully*, and like artificial Orators put what Colour they pleaſe upon it. They will pervert and *wreſt*, diſtort and writhe the Text, till they force it to ſerve the Cauſe they eſpouſe, and are reſolved beforehand to maintain. 2 Cor. 2. 17. 4. 2. Eph. 4. 14. 2 Pet. 3. 16.

And ſo it would be, if there were an Infallible Judge, and ſo it was when there were Inſpired Perſons in the Church, when our Saviour himſelf was in the Chair, and the Apoſtles were *helpers* of their Faith.

So that there is no Fence in the World againſt Perverſeneſs and Obſtinacy, againſt Pride and Self-conceit, againſt Intereſt and Self-ſeeking.

Theſe things indeed will make the Scripture difficult, and Truth unintelligible, though ne'er ſo plain in it ſelf, or never ſo evidently proved: When in the Phraſe of Scripture, *Their heart is*

Matth. 13. 15. *waxed groſs, and their ears are dull of hearing, and they have cloſed their eyes, leſt at any time they ſhould ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their heart.* For then it is with ſuch as with a ſickly Stomach, that will nauſeate the moſt wholſome and delightful Diet: In which Caſe it is not the fault of the Diet, but of the Stomach, which wants an Appetite, or of the Palate that wants the ſavour, which is the occaſion of the diſorder; and for remedy of which, the Body is to be Cured, and the Stomach to be reſtored to its natural Tone and Temper; and then the ſame Diet will be nouriſhing and grateful as before.

So it is in the Caſe before us, where it is not the Underſtanding but the Will that is in the fault, or ſome pre-occupations and Iniſter Inclinations, that do Cloud the mind and keep it from judging, or diſpoſe it by ſuch fatal Biaſſes to judge amiſs.

But now if the contrary Temper prevail, that Men *lay aſide all filthineſs and ſuperfluity of naughtineſs*, all Prejudices and Intereſts, *and receive with meekneſs the ingrafted word*: If they are candid and ingenuous, free and impartial, and come with an hearty deſire to know the truth, and with a ſtedfaſt reſolution to be guided by it (whether it be for or againſt their Worldly Intereſt), and to

Jam. 1. 21.

do

do according to what they know, they ſhall not finally and fundamentally miſtake; according to our Saviour's reſolution of this Caſe, *Joh.* 7. 17. *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or,* ſaith he, *whether I ſpeak of my ſelf.* So again, *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my Diſciples indeed, and ye ſhall know the truth, John* 8. 31, 32. For God will not leave an honeſt mind without ſuch means as ſhall be ſufficient for the underſtanding of all things neceſſary to Salvation. He that ſent a *Philip* to an *Eunuch*, and an Angel to *Cornelius*, and called to a *Saul* out of Heaven, will preſent ſuch occaſions, give ſuch aſſiſtance, or direct to ſuch Inſtructors, that ſhall, as *Aquila* to *Apollos*, *expound unto* them *the way of God more perfectly.* Acts 8. 26. 10. 5. 9. 4. Act. 18. 26.

And if we put the Caſe, that a Perſon ſincerely diſpoſed to know and receive the Truth ſhould fall into error (for man is a fallible Creature), yet the Error ſhall not be Damnable, but what may be as conſiſtent with his being a Chriſtian and Orthodox, as Infirmities are with a good Man, and Sincerity. For as in the preſent State, which is a State of Infirmity, there is no arriving to ſuch an eſtabliſhed temper of Virtue and Goodneſs, but that *Elijah*, and *Paul*, and *Barnabas*, and the beſt of Men were *ſubject to like paſſions* with others: Jam. 5. 17. Acts 14. 15.

So neither is it poſſible by the utmoſt Diligence, and the moſt laborious Searching, to find out the Truth, ſo as ne'er to miſtake nor embrace Error for it (for that would as much be above the ſtate of Nature thus to be infallible, as impeccable); nor is it neceſſary, when a perſon may be ſaved with all tolerable Errors, as with natural and unavoidable Infirmities. And this then neither the Providence of God, nor the Promiſe of our Saviour are concerned to prevent: For theſe are like Diſeaſes that belong to the quality of the State we are in; and are no more to be prevented, than our Nature and our State are to be alter'd, and of imperfect to be made perfect.

But ſo far both the Promiſe, and the Providence of God, in confirmation of that promiſe, are concerned, that a perſon of a truly ſincere mind, continuing ſuch, ſhall no more fall into a damnable error without his own fault and choice, than be guilty of a Damnable Sin; for that would be to leave Him in a damnable condition, who upon the terms of the Goſpel otherwiſe moſt certainly ſhould be ſaved. For no Sin under that Diſpenſation damns, but what is wilful; according to that known Saying of St. *Auſtin*, *Nihil ardet in Inferno niſi propria voluntas.*

Or

Or however, if he ſhould fall into ſuch an error, as is againſt a fundamental Article, and for the quality of it, is damnable: Yet it ſhall not be damnable to him. It is a Caſe ſpecial, and what, though it falls not within the ordinary Rules of the Goſpel, ſhall however taſte of the mercy of it.

The Apoſtle ſpeaks of *Damnable Hereſies*; and we have thoſe Truths which we call Fundamental, and both are rightly ſo termed; becauſe thoſe Truths are ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian Faith, that it cannot be the Chriſtian Faith without them: And thoſe Hereſies are ſo deſtructive to the Chriſtian Faith, that it cannot be the Chriſtian Faith with them. 2 Pet. 2. 1.

But yet becauſe it is an error of invincible Ignorance, and what proceeds from a mere defect in the Underſtanding, and not in the Will, we may charitably conceive, that it being not that ſort of *Hereſy*, which is a *Work of the Fleſh*, God will not impute it to ſuch to their Condemnation; and that their Piety towards God, and Charity towards Men, ſhall through Chriſt's Merits and Interceſſion do more to ſave them, than their involuntary miſtakes, how great ſoever, ſhall do to damn them: Since God requires *according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* But Gal. 5. 20. 2 Cor. 8. 12.

But becauſe for the moſt part the Error is rather in the Will than in the Underſtanding, or at leaſt is then the more pernicious of the two: therefore as we ſhould enquire after the truth, and be careful to receive it when it is propoſed; ſo it is as neceſſary that we ſhould *receive the truth in the love of it*, and then it will have an influence upon us proportionable to the Conſequence and Importance of it.

2 Theſſ. 2. 10.

And as they are the beſt, moſt uſeful and neceſſary Principles that moſt of all tend to make Men Good and Religious; ſo that is the beſt Teſtimony of our being in the right, and that our Principles are true, that we are thereby made more holy and pure, more juſt and charitable. I look upon this as an undoubted Evidence of the Truth of the Chriſtian Revelation, that it moſt of all conduces to ſuch an Excellent end; and it will appear that he beſt underſtands it, that makes it the Rule of his Life as well as of his Faith; which if he doth, as he cannot likely miſtake in his enquiry after Truth, ſo it's certain in the Iſſue he ſhall not miſcarry. For then he that comes thus prepared to *Search the Scriptures*, will both find what they *teſtify* unto, and obtain that *Eternal Life*, which is therein revealed and promiſed.

There

There it is then that the matters of greateſt Conſequence are to be found, and all Points relating to them are reſolved, ſuch as do moſt nearly concern our Eternal Happineſs.

And if Scriptures do require our utmoſt Diligence and Care to find out their meaning, yet in the iſſue when found out, it will reward all our pains, though it be as great as the Affairs of this preſent Life are not managed nor accompliſhed without.

I do acknowledge the Church of *Rome* hath put this mattet into a far more compendious courſe, if it were as true as it is ſhort, by an Infallible Judge, who by an *Ipſe dixit*, without giving any reaſon, ſtamps upon all he ſaith, an uncontroulable Authority; but that muſt be, if a perſon is ſo near the Papal Chair, as to have the Infallible Ear to apply himſelf to, and immediately receives the dictates from the Infallible Oracle. For if he be remote from him, and receives all by Written Decrees, or the Oral Tradition of others, it iſſues then into a kind of Infallible Rule, and fails to be the Sentence of the Infallible Judge. For Words and Writings if they once fall into Fallible hands, according to them, ceaſe to be Infallible, and are as much ſubject to difficulties, and about the ſenſe of which have often happen'd

pen'd as endleſs Contentions and Miſunderſtandings, as ever they can pretend have happened to an Infallible Rule. Therefore they are no ſafer, nor leſs ſubject to err by the having an Infallible Judge, than we by an Infallible Rule: Nay, ſo much the worſe is it with them, as we cannot ſuppoſe that an Infallible Judge (if we go to their Fountain-head) can more clearly interpret the Divine Rule, than God himſelf could and did direct and dictate to thoſe who wrote it. So that at laſt they are left with all their Pretences to Infallibility, in a condition worſe than thoſe that have an Infallible Rule for their Director; and that with their own Diligence and Searching, and the bleſſing of God concurring therewith, like *Apollos*, become *mighty in the Scriptures*, *Act.* 18. 24.: For to ſuch is that ſpoken which never was ſaid to any Infallible Judge, *If any man will do his will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God.*

F I N I S.

ERRATA.

SErm. 1ſt. *Page* 21. *Line* 17. *Read* needs. *p.* 26. *l.* 4. *r.* Enthuſiaſtical. *p.* 29. *l.* 8. *r.* of one among them. *p.* 31. *Margin add* V. *Dr.* Gedis, Of the Eccleſiaſtical State of *Ethiopia*. Appendix.

Serm. 2d. *p.* 6. *l.* 7. *r.* and things. *p.* 9. *l.* 18. *r.* 16.